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King Louis the Great of Hungary and the Crusades, 1342–1382

NORMAN HOUSLEY

In the course of a long and active reign Louis the Great of Hungary built up a substantial reputation as a crusader. His deeds on behalf of the Catholic Church and Faith were recounted in glowing terms by the papal court. In 1356 he was described as one who had already served his Redeemer well by his campaigns against the pagan Lithuanians and the schismatics and heretics of Serbia.¹ Eight years later Pope Urban V portrayed him as the ideal Christian ruler, 'very devout prince and most illustrious son of God's holy Church', who employed his God-given strength 'first against the wicked Christian enemies of the Church, then against the schismatics and those tainted with the filth of heresy, and on another occasion against the unbelievers and the heathens'.² And in 1373 Gregory XI praised the king as 'most Christian prince and heroic hammer of the infidels'.³ Not for Louis the sort of internecine conflicts which decimated Anglo-French chivalry in France, Spain, and Flanders; he was in the forefront of Christian Holy War, holding back the Lithuanians and their Tatar allies, regaining Serbia and parts of Bulgaria for the Catholic Church, defending the Italian lands of the Holy See against its Ghibelline enemies, and in his last years organizing the defence of the Balkans against the Ottoman Turks. At least this was the way Louis liked to see himself,⁴ and it is important to understand how a fourteenth-century king could acquire such renown. The impression he made on his contemporaries was a deep one: it has been suggested that the example of Louis's crusading fame helped to inspire the expedition of Amadeo of Savoy.⁵ He has also impressed historians, amongst whom his role as champion of the Church has contributed

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¹ P. Gasnault and M. H. Laurent, eds, *Innocent VI: Lettres secrètes et curiales*, Paris, 1959 ff. (hereafter Gasnault and Laurent), no. 2316.

² P. Lecacheux and G. Mollat, eds, *Urban V: Lettres secrètes et curiales se rapportant à la France*, Paris, 1902–55 (hereafter Lecacheux and Mollat), no. 825.

³ A. Theiner, ed., *Vetera monumenta historica Hungariam sacram illustrantia*, Rome, 1859–60 (hereafter Theiner, *VMH*), II, no. 271.

⁴ He described himself as 'princeps catholicus et honoris exultationis ecclesie prefate zelator': Theiner, *VMH*, II, no. 82. Cf. *Annales ecclesiastici*, ed. C. Baronio *et al.*, Paris–Freiburg–Bar le Duc, 1864–87 (hereafter *Annales ecclesiastici*), ad annum 1356, no. 24, vol. XXVI, p. 12.

⁵ See E. L. Cox, *The Green Count of Savoy: Amadeus VI and Transalpine Savoy in the Fourteenth Century*, Princeton, 1967, p. 238.

to the generally accepted view that he was one of the finest of Hungary's medieval kings. Bálint Hóman, for example, wrote that 'his respect for justice and moral sense made this "pious king" into a crusader, the standard-bearer of the Church, the more so in that he saw it as his knightly duty to defend the Faith and the Church: and that brought him a fame which will last as long as the world endures'.⁶ Did Louis deserve this reputation, or was he simply an astute politician whose influence at the papal Curia was strong enough to elicit fair words and a string of crusading privileges and taxes?

From the point of view of its king's participation in the crusading movement, fourteenth-century Hungary was very well-placed. To its north-east, across the Carpathians, lay pagan Lithuania and the decaying Tatar power. On its southern frontier lay the kingdom of Serbia, whose church was separated from Rome by schism. In the south-eastern Balkans the second half of Louis's reign was remarkable for the rapid expansion of Ottoman power at the expense of Bulgaria, also schismatic, and Byzantium, whose emperors were striving to heal the breach with the papacy in order to secure the military aid of Catholic monarchs like Louis.⁷ Across the Adriatic Sea the popes were making enormous efforts to reassert their temporal authority in central Italy and to stop the growth of Visconti power in Lombardy. In this political and religious complex the Kingdom of Hungary had a key role: that of a united, stable and forceful Catholic state embarking on policies of expansion under a vigorous and popular ruler. But simply because of the complexity of the situation Louis's activities could not follow a straightforward pattern. He had schismatic or heretical groups within his own lands,⁸ and he had Christian enemies against whom he wished to direct the resources of the Holy War. So there was no easy equation of Hungarian interests with the crusading ideals of the day or the policy of the Avignonese Curia; rather an uneasy interplay between them, which resulted in some achievements but rather more disappointments.

I

In the early years of his reign King Louis's crusading activity was directed northwards against the Lithuanians. On this front he acted

⁶ *Gli angioini di Napoli in Ungheria (1290-1403)*, Rome, 1938, p. 441.

⁷ See O. Halecki, *Un Empereur de Byzance à Rome: Vingt ans de travail pour l'union des églises et pour la défense de l'empire d'orient, 1355-1375*, Warsaw, 1930 (hereafter Halecki, *Empereur de Byzance*).

⁸ Bosnia held an important branch of the Cathar Church. See M. D. Lambert, *Medieval Heresy: Popular Movements from Bogomil to Hus*, London, 1977, pp. 142 ff.; B. Hamilton, *The Medieval Inquisition*, London, 1981, p. 80.

in an auxiliary capacity as the ally of other Catholic rulers threatened by the pagans or expanding their frontiers.⁹ But there were Hungarian interests too, as the Lithuanians and Tatars periodically raided Hungary's northern provinces and Louis was heir to the Polish throne. At the end of 1344 Louis took part in a crusading expedition organized by King John of Bohemia in co-operation with the Teutonic Knights. The campaign was a military fiasco and led to a serious dispute amongst the Christians; in 1345 Louis had to send help to his uncle Casimir of Poland who was threatened with a Bohemian invasion because of a Polish attack on the crusaders the previous year. That Hungarian soldiers should fight on opposing sides within a matter of months is typical of the confused political situation in this part of Europe.¹⁰ In 1351 there was a more important campaign: Lubart and Keystut, two Lithuanian princes, launched an attack on Poland and Louis led an army across the Carpathians to help Casimir.¹¹ There were Christian successes but in the following year the Lithuanians hired Tatar mercenaries to lay waste the disputed provinces of Galicia and Lodomiria. Crusade preaching was decreed in May throughout Poland, Hungary and Bohemia, to continue for three years, and Louis was granted a four-year tenth for the defence of the realm.¹² The campaign of 1352 ended in a two-year truce, but according to the information reaching Avignon the truce was not observed by the Lithuanians. In November 1354 Innocent VI ordered a renewal of crusade preaching in eastern Europe at the request of King Casimir.¹³ This time the defeat of the Lithuanians was decisive and Louis was able to secure his eastern borders from Tatar attack. For the rest of his reign the northern front was relatively stable.

The Lithuanian expeditions of 1344 and 1352 were separated by Louis's two campaigns in southern Italy to avenge the murder of his brother Andrew (1347 and 1350).¹⁴ These were amongst the best-planned and most smoothly-executed military ventures of the reign. But they were not successful, not least because they were opposed by Pope Clement VI, who could not approve of the creation of a single

⁹ Notably Poland: see P. W. Knoll, *The Rise of the Polish Monarchy: Piast Poland in East Central Europe, 1320–1370*, Chicago, London, 1972 (hereafter Knoll, *Polish Monarchy*), *passim*. E. Christiansen, *The Northern Crusades: The Baltic and the Catholic Frontier 1100–1525*, London, 1980, pp. 132–70 is useful.

¹⁰ See Knoll, *Polish Monarchy*, pp. 183–90.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 148 ff.

¹² Theiner, *VMH*, I, no. 1249; Theiner, ed., *Vetera monumenta Poloniae et Lithuaniae gentiumque finitimarum historiam illustrantia*, Rome, 1860–64, I, no. 713.

¹³ Theiner, *VMH*, II, no. 18.

¹⁴ For a full account see E. G. Léonard, *Histoire de Jeanne 1^{re}: Reine de Naples, comtesse de Provence (1343–1382)*, Monaco–Paris, 1932–36, II, *passim*.

state stretching from the Carpathians to the straits of Messina. The Curia certainly did not throw all its resources into the defence of the Neapolitan Angevins, but it showed Louis by its disapproval the advantages which accrued from papal backing, even when it stopped short of the crusade. The lesson was driven home by papal concessions of July 1352. The grant of a four-year tenth, which Clement described as exceptional, 'to no other prince do we recall having granted a tenth of such duration', was linked explicitly to Louis's release of his high-ranking Neapolitan prisoners, and implicitly to his generous renunciation of Queen Joanna's war-indemnity.¹⁵ Similarly, Clement granted Louis and his successors full possession of any lands which the king conquered while fighting against heathens and schismatics on Hungary's borders, provided that he did not encroach on the legitimate property rights of others.¹⁶ Thus Hungarian might was directed away from the *Regno*; expansion against the enemies of the Faith in the north, south or east, on the other hand, would receive the fruits of papal favour.¹⁷

It was the south which appealed most strongly to Louis. In the early 1350s his immediate aims were to reassert Hungarian supremacy over the Balkan states and to control the Adriatic and its commerce by securing Croatia and conquering the Dalmatian towns. The subjection and dismemberment of Serbia formed an important part of this programme and, as a missionary-war against schismatics, could aspire to crusade status. The Serbian king, Stephen Dushan, tried to counter this threat by constructing a firm alliance with Venice and by opening negotiations with Avignon on Church union. He hoped to steal Louis's crusading thunder by seizing Constantinople from the Palaeologi and himself leading a Christian offensive against the Turks. At the end of 1354 he even asked Innocent VI to appoint him captain of the Roman Church with the duty of defending the Christians in the East.¹⁸ Although clearly inspired by fear of Hungary,¹⁹ the offer of union was taken seriously by the Curia. Serbia was a strong power, had conquered much of Greece and the southern Balkans, and could well serve as a bulwark against the Turks, who had captured Gallipoli earlier in 1354. In addition, while it was necessary to divert Louis from Naples it was by no means clear that a Hungarian conquest of Serbia was the best way to restore Catholicism there. The situation was evenly balanced.

¹⁵ Theiner, *VMH*, I, no. 1253.

¹⁶ *Annales ecclesiastici*, ad annum 1352, no. 6, vol. xxv, pp. 528–29.

¹⁷ Cf. I. A. Fessler, *Geschichte von Ungarn*, Leipzig, 1877, II, p. 129.

¹⁸ Gasnault and Laurent, no. 1249.

¹⁹ See for example S. Baluze and G. Mollat, eds, *Vitae paparum avenionensium*, Paris, 1914–27, I, p. 333.

1355 was therefore a difficult year for Louis. He continued to press for a crusade against the Serbs but Stephen Dushan's overtures led Innocent VI to despatch two nuncios to Serbia to negotiate union. One of these was Peter Thomas, near the beginning of his long career as a papal diplomatic agent.²⁰ The mission was not a success, and even Oskar Halecki confessed himself puzzled by its failure, attributing it to Louis of Hungary's warlike preparations and to the hard-line negotiating tactics of Peter Thomas.²¹ I would suggest that it was probably an important new factor which tipped the balance against a negotiated union and in favour of Louis's crusade project. This was the heavy opposition which Gil Albornoz was facing in Romagna in the course of his reconquest of the Papal State. Extra funds and soldiers were urgently needed and Hungary was geographically well-placed to provide both. In December 1355 Louis and the leading prelates of the Hungarian Church were asked to send troops to help the cause of the Church in Italy.²² An even broader scheme was slowly taking shape: that of Louis himself becoming the captain of the Roman Church, its *brachium seculare* in the struggle against the Ghibellines. But Louis's co-operation in Italy could hardly be expected unless his Balkans project received papal backing.

Early in 1356 the papal nuncios left Serbia. Peter Thomas passed through Hungary and accompanied back to Avignon a Hungarian envoy with a letter from Louis, expounding the justification and conditions of his crusade proposal. Serbia, he wrote, belonged to his kingdom by right and was illegally held by rebels, schismatics and unbelievers. Its reconquest by Hungary would mean its reunion with the Roman Church. This was a very convenient argument for an ambitious Christian ruler with schismatic neighbours but it has been pointed out that it was not necessarily a hypocritical one.²³ Louis's proselytizing zeal in his Balkan conquests was remarkable and at times ran counter to his own interests. In exchange for crusade preaching, 'with the customary indulgences and remissions', Louis was prepared to take a solemn oath not to attack lands held by Roman Christians, to rule benignly over the Serbs and to protect the privileges and immunities of churches and monasteries in the lands he conquered. He would welcome a papal legate to preach the crusade and represent the pope on the expedition.²⁴ Despite these assurances Innocent VI was sceptical. He knew that Louis was

²⁰ See F. J. Boehlke, *Pierre de Thomas: Scholar, Diplomat and Crusader*, Philadelphia, 1966.

²¹ Halecki, *Empereur de Byzance*, pp. 26–27.

²² Gasnault and Laurent, nos. 1863, 1865, and see also nos. 1873, 1877.

²³ See Knoll, *Polish Monarchy*, pp. 4–5, 175.

²⁴ *Annales ecclesiastici*, ad annum 1356, nos. 24–26, vol. xxvi, pp. 11–13.

planning an attack on Dalmatia and its Christian cities; already in June the king was campaigning in the March of Treviso against Venice.²⁵ Thus on 4 July 1356 Louis was sent a letter commanding his Serbian project but deplored the dispute with Venice. The Bishop of Fermo was sent to negotiate peace so that Louis could fight the Serbs.²⁶

Innocent VI was particularly anxious to end Louis's war with Venice because he needed the republic's services in the eastern Mediterranean. He was trying to reconstitute Clement VI's naval league against the Turks, and on the same day that he commended the Bishop of Fermo to the Doge, Innocent reminded him to send envoys to the Curia to make final arrangements about the league.²⁷ The pope was also eager to secure Hungarian troops for the Romagna war, which meant placating Louis over Serbia. On 1 July another request was sent to Louis to ask him to send soldiers to aid Albornoz, and to allow Hungarian churchmen to send troops.²⁸ By 17 July these factors had combined in a detailed scheme of great interest which was to have repercussions in papal-Hungarian relations over the next twenty years. Louis was appointed captain of the Church, with the duty of helping its armies against Francesco Ordelaffi and the other rebels in Romagna, when requested to do so by the pope or his legate. In return he was granted crusade preaching against the Serbs, on condition that he did not attack the Kingdom of Albania or the Duchy of Durazzo. The patriarchs of Aquileia and Grado and the Archbishop of Salzburg were to publish the papal decree against Christians who aided the heretics and schismatics of Serbia, and the Doge of Venice was warned to end his alliance with the Serbs.²⁹ On 4 August Louis was solemnly declared to be the standard-bearer of the Church by pope and cardinals in consistory.³⁰ On 11 August the king was granted a three-year tenth in his lands to pay the expenses of his captaincy and was asked to obey the instructions of Albornoz in relation to Romagna.³¹

How should we view this project? Obviously it fits into the well-established tradition of tying a powerful secular prince to the military needs of the Holy See in exchange for a high-sounding title ('captain' or 'standard-bearer'), and a series of taxes and other

²⁵ F. Gherardi Dragomanni, ed., *Croniche storiche di Giovanni, Matteo e Filippo Villani*, Milan, 1848 (hereafter Gherardi Dragomanni), v, p. 506.

²⁶ Gasnault and Laurent, no. 2230.

²⁷ Ibid., nos. 2232–33. For Innocent VI's attempt to revive the naval league, see N. Jorga, *Philippe de Mézières, 1327–1405 et la Croisade au XIV^e siècle*, Paris, 1896, pp. 100–01.

²⁸ Gasnault and Laurent, no. 2224.

²⁹ Ibid., nos. 2267, 2272–73.

³⁰ Gherardi Dragomanni, v, p. 515.

³¹ Gasnault and Laurent, nos. 2316–17, 2320–21, 2324.

concessions. Louis was following in the footsteps of his great-great-grandfather, Charles of Anjou, and of other Capetian and Angevin kings and princes. Equally clearly, it followed the pattern of papal crusading policy since the early thirteenth century: of treating the war in Italy as a crusading venture which was just as important as the struggle against Muslims, pagans or schismatics, 'because the affairs of God (*Dei negotia*), although different in character, are directed to one and the same end and purpose, that is to say the prize of an eternal reward'.³² Particularly interesting is the Petrine content of Innocent's approach, markedly more pronounced than in the letters of his predecessors. To Innocent, the recovery of the saint's lands in central Italy was of supreme importance and would earn his help in other matters:

We have complete faith in the power of the Lord, and we place our hope in the merits and intercession of the blessed Peter, prince of the Apostles, whose cause we are pursuing, that the obstinacy of these rebels will be speedily crushed and wholly shattered, and that . . . the same prince of the Apostolic Order will accompany you on your campaign and will intercede assiduously and successfully with the Lord for its fruitful progress and your salvation.³³

It is possible that the Hungarian captaincy had special appeal for the Curia in one respect. The problem with the Angevins and the Capetians had been that they tended to establish themselves politically in central and northern Italy and so present a threat to the Church's independence. As Louis's fixed interests lay elsewhere, this would be easier to avoid in his case. Similarly, his intervention would not mean the arrival and staying-on of yet more mercenary soldiers to join those already plaguing the peninsula: it could be expected that the royal troops would rapidly be taken away for work in the Balkans. Louis's efficient management of his invasions of the *Regno* must have encouraged this view. This assessment of Hungarian interests was in fact correct, and the problem with Louis was getting him to send troops in the required strength.

There remained the issue of Louis's quarrel with Venice. In the late summer of 1356 Peter Thomas set out as nuncio to restore peace between the two Christian powers. And if Louis was to conduct a crusade against schismatics and heretics, then he must first act against the heretics in his own lands of Bosnia: 'it befits your honour

³² Ibid., no. 2316. For previous crusades against Ghibelline rulers and their place in papal crusading policy, see my book, *The Italian Crusades: The Papal-Angevin Alliance and the Crusades against Christian Lay Powers, 1254-1343*, Oxford, 1982 (hereafter Housley, *Italian Crusades*).

³³ Gasnault and Laurent, no. 2316.

and [spiritual] health that you, who propose to drive out the heretics in far-off parts, should not allow them to remain in the bosom of your kingdom'.³⁴ These problems dealt with, however, Louis could be regarded as a suitable champion of the Roman Church, and on 18 August all Christians were asked to pray for the success of his expedition against the Serbs.³⁵

The captaincy of 1356 had mixed results. Louis directed his military energies less against Serbia than against Venice and the Dalmatian towns. In February 1358 Venice was forced to accept defeat, a very great blow to the republic's pride and prestige, and in the following year Louis at last led a campaign against the Serbs. This was hardly the shape of the crusade outlined three years earlier. Louis carried out his commitments in Italy with rather more exactitude. At the beginning of 1357 Francesco Ordelaffi was the last remaining problem in Romagna, 'the other rebels having been humbled and tamed by the powerful hand of the Church', and Louis was asked to co-operate in his destruction. He sent troops and in May was again called on for help when the mercenaries of Conrad of Landau arrived to relieve Francesco.³⁶ In August 1357 his performance was evidently judged adequate as the promised three-year tenth was levied on the Hungarian Church, and in December he was thanked for sending 'a sizeable body of men-at-arms' to defend the Church's lands.³⁷ The captaincy was operating still in 1359, when Louis was asked to send soldiers to help Androin de la Roche fight the companies,³⁸ and in 1360 the king threatened Bernabò Visconti with Hungarian opposition if the Ghibelline tyrant continued to besiege papal Bologna.³⁹ The project of 1356 can hardly be said to have been outstandingly successful: it brought no Benevento. But it made the work of Albornoz and Androin de la Roche somewhat easier, and it kept hopes alive at Avignon that the king of Hungary could be persuaded to intervene more forcefully, hopes that Louis was to encourage by occasional offers of help.

II

Pope Innocent VI died in September 1362 and his successor, Urban V, was less favourably inclined towards Louis. Two new

³⁴ *Ibid.*, no. 2328.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, no. 2329.

³⁶ Theiner, *VMH*, II, nos. 51, 53–54, 56.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, II, nos. 61–63.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, II, no. 75. See also Fessler, *op. cit.*, II, pp. 144 ff.

³⁹ Theiner, *VMH*, II, no. 82. Cf. G. Mollat, *The Popes at Avignon, 1305–1378*, tr. J. Love, London, 1963, p. 142.

factors began to affect relations between the two courts, especially the crusading aspirations of King Louis. The first was the issue of the taxation of the Hungarian Church for the pope's Italian wars. Under Innocent VI and Urban V papal taxation of the Church reached heights previously scaled only by John XXII;⁴⁰ moreover, political and economic difficulties had seriously diminished the revenue which could be drawn from the French and English Churches, and the ability to extract money from the Churches of eastern Europe was essential to the solvency of the papal *camera*. But, like other fourteenth-century rulers, Louis wanted to retain the resources of his Church for his own enterprises, and by engaging in wars against schismatics he had a certain propaganda advantage which he was not afraid to use. He also started harassing papal agents and collectors. Much could be done through minor royal officials without directly implicating the king. Thus in May 1363 Louis was asked to stop impeding the collection of papal revenue in his lands.⁴¹ Though an attempt was made to blame the royal counsellors, the Curia sensed that resistance started at the top. It was serious because in June 1363 a new three-year tenth was levied on the Hungarian Church, which Louis was asked to support.⁴² Tensions had now arisen which were to last to the end of the reign.

The second new factor was the revival of plans for a large-scale crusade to the eastern Mediterranean.⁴³ From early 1363 it was hoped that Louis would either give aid to, or take part in, the Franco-Cypriot expedition. On 15 April a Dominican nuncio was sent to Hungary to discuss the crusade amongst other topics, and on 25 May Louis was urged to participate in the crusade, as a king who was at once powerful, devoted to Christ's service, and well-placed to help.⁴⁴ There could be no doubt about the first of these adjectives. The early 1360s was the period of Louis's greatest success. He had achieved suzerainty over Serbia, defeated Venice, and annexed the northern part of Bulgaria. To a certain extent he could decide what to do next. Both Italy and the Balkans had appeal as areas of intervention and expansion. A forceful military presence in Lombardy would bring Louis the grant of tenths on his Church, papal subsidies, prestige and spiritual benefits as a papal champion, political hegemony in a prosperous and unsettled area, a pincer-grip on his enemy Venice and great weight in his rivalry with Charles of

⁴⁰ See Housley, *Italian Crusades*, chapter six, esp. pp. 178–85.

⁴¹ Theiner, *VMH*, II, nos. 98–99.

⁴² *Ibid.*, II, no. 101.

⁴³ See K. M. Setton, *The Papacy and the Levant (1204–1571)*, I, *The Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries*, Philadelphia, 1976 (hereafter Setton, *Papacy and the Levant*), pp. 243–45.

⁴⁴ Theiner, *VMH*, II, nos. 96, 100. See also Setton, *Papacy and the Levant*, pp. 251n–252n.

Bohemia. Participation in the eastern crusade would bring him a share of the glory as saviour of the eastern Christians, lands in the Balkans and, again, Church taxes and subsidies.

Early in 1364 Louis appears to have leaned towards a renewal of the agreement of 1356 and intervention in Italy. He wrote to Urban V that, once he had patched up his quarrel with Charles IV, he would send 'a powerful and timely army' in the service of God, St Peter and the Roman Church at his own expense for a year. Urban lavished praise on this 'magnificent offer, unheard of in modern times'. It was not needed at the moment thanks to the peace negotiations in progress, but the pope would store it up as a 'most precious treasure' for future reference and use.⁴⁵ But it would probably be wrong to attach much importance to Louis's proposal as a guide to his current interests. Offering to send help when it was clear that a powerful peace-lobby was active at Avignon was a fairly non-committal gesture, and it was part of the political culture of the day to offer to aid the pope in his Italian wars: there were similar letters of thanks to the Count of Warwick in November 1363 and to King Peter of Castile in 1365.⁴⁶ It was useful to Louis as a means of keeping his Italian interests on the boil (including his continuing ambitions in the *Regno*), and as a counter-weight to the fact that he was at the same time preventing the collection of papal revenue in his lands.⁴⁷ Thus in June 1364 the king was congratulated on his peace with Charles IV and thanked for a renewed offer of help in Italy.⁴⁸ Lombardy could not become a major issue, as peace was reached between the pope and Bernabò Visconti in the summer of 1364.

It seemed rather that Louis was intent on playing a leading role in a crusade in the Balkans. He was genuinely concerned about the rapid advance of the Ottoman Turks and the weakness of Byzantium, the more so as his Bulgarian conquests brought him nearer to Constantinople: Vidin was wrested from the Bulgarians in a short campaign in 1365. The middle years of the decade witnessed a series of disappointed hopes. At the Cracow conference of 1364 Louis promised aid to Peter of Cyprus for his expedition, but he sent nothing.⁴⁹ Hopes were high, however, that there would be a joint crusade in the following year led by Amadeo of Savoy and Louis in person. There was a Hungarian messenger at Amadeo's court in September 1365 and the count later claimed that Louis promised to

⁴⁵ Lecacheux and Mollat, no. 825.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, nos. 682, 1612.

⁴⁷ Theiner, *VMH*, II, no. 109.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, II, no. 111.

⁴⁹ For Louis's promises, see Guillaume de Machaut, *La Prise d'Alexandrie*, ed. L. de Mas Latrie, Geneva, 1877, p. 41.

lead an army in his support.⁵⁰ In January 1366 Urban V even wrote to John V Palaeologus of a crusade consisting of three separate contingents:

You know for sure that on land our very dear son in Christ Louis, illustrious King of Hungary, undoubtedly a most devout and powerful prince, has come into contact with the borders of these enemies and desires their annihilation, and you are aware that King Peter of Cyprus has adequate strength at sea, while Amadeo, Count of Savoy, is approaching those regions in a spirit of devotion, accompanied by a large force of nobles.⁵¹

Relying on such help, John V Palaeologus made his famous journey to Buda early in 1366 to plead for Hungarian aid and promise to obey papal instructions on Church union.⁵² Louis made a solemn promise to help the emperor, and requested crusade privileges. On 1 July 1366 papal letters were sent out granting the king full-scale crusade preaching against the Turks, who were now entrenched in the south-east Balkans.⁵³ But although Louis made considerable preparations, nothing was done.⁵⁴ Even before the issue of the July privileges, moreover, Urban V suspended for a year the king's promise to help John Palaeologus because of fear that the Greeks would get western aid without guaranteeing union: 'these Greeks do not appear to want union by choice alone and through religious zeal, but are driven to it so as to get your help'.⁵⁵ Hungarian retrenchment in the Balkans was confirmed by the deaths, in 1367, of both royal advisers who had pressed for a vigorous policy there.⁵⁶ In April 1368 fresh indulgences were granted by the pope because Louis intended 'to approach in person the lands of the unbelievers, schismatics, and patarenes, the enemies of the Catholic Faith, with your army, in order to wage war on them'.⁵⁷ But in asking for these Louis only had the intention of defending his Bulgarian winnings of three years earlier from the attacks of John Šišman. Since the latter had Turkish support this was considered as a form of anti-Turkish action, but it was scarcely what had been hoped for in 1365 and 1366.

⁵⁰ Jorga, op. cit., p. 332n; Setton, *Papacy and the Levant*, p. 298.

⁵¹ *Annales ecclesiastici*, ad annum 1366, nos. 1-2, vol. xxvi, p. 122.

⁵² Halecki, *Empereur de Byzance*, pp. 111 ff.; D. M. Nicol, *The Last Centuries of Byzantium 1261-1453*, London, 1972, pp. 275-76.

⁵³ Theiner, *VMH*, II, nos. 142-46, and see also no. 156.

⁵⁴ Setton, *Papacy and the Levant*, pp. 290-91.

⁵⁵ Theiner, *VMH*, II, no. 139, and see also no. 140. Urban V probably wrote this letter at Louis's request, to provide the king with an escape clause: Halecki, *Empereur de Byzance*, pp. 129-31; Setton, *Papacy and the Levant*, pp. 289-90n. For the problems associated with the Buda meeting, see also J. Gill, 'John V Palaeologus at the Court of Louis I of Hungary (1366)' (*Byzantinoslavica*, xxxviii, Prague 1977, pp. 31-38).

⁵⁶ Halecki, *Empereur de Byzance*, p. 136.

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 184 and note.

For the next few years the Curia continued its policy of taxing the Hungarian Church for the war against the Visconti, while Louis reverted to his intermittent offers of Hungarian soldiers to take part in it. In the summer of 1367 the king agreed to a defensive treaty of seven years duration with Charles IV, the papacy and their allies, a pact aimed against the Visconti and Verona.⁵⁸ Late in 1369 Urban V wrote to Anglie Grimoard, his vicar-general in Italy, that Louis had offered to come to Italy in person with 10,000 men-at-arms if two-thirds of his expenses were paid for him. Anglie was to sound out the Church's allies to see if they would help pay Louis's costs. Louis himself received a fairly cautious response from a Curia which was by now rather sceptical about his proposals of aid. But negotiations were pursued by a papal nuncio in 1370, if only because of the gravity of the threat posed by Bernabò Visconti in conjunction with the mercenary companies; as the pope wrote to Charles IV in July, Hungarian help seemed the only real solution.⁵⁹ When Urban abandoned Italy in the summer he still entertained some hopes of Louis's arrival.⁶⁰

III

For the first year or so of Gregory XI's reign the pattern continued. The new pope pursued the war against the Visconti with greater determination than his predecessor and his taxation of the Church was heavy.⁶¹ Inevitably Louis raised fresh objections. In 1371 he complained that the clergy of Dalmatia and Croatia had contributed to the procurations of papal legates operating in Italy. Gregory protested that he could find no details of this in the Curia's records. He asked for more information and half-promised lesser burdens. Louis seems to have made promises of his own, 'for we know what you have done to date for the said Roman Church, and what you have generously offered, and undoubtedly we hope that in future you will carry out what you have offered and more'.⁶² The king still possessed considerable influence in Italy, for in December 1371 Gregory asked him to exert pressure on the Florentines to send help to Nicholas Este, a papal ally who was defending Modena against the Ghibellines.⁶³ Louis was again holding out hopes that he

⁵⁸ *Annales ecclesiastici*, ad annum 1367, no. 16, vol. xxvi, pp. 148–49.

⁵⁹ Theiner, *VMH*, II, nos. 178, 180, 195, 199.

⁶⁰ Lecacheux and Mollat, no. 3178. Cf. the comments of Halecki, *Empereur de Byzance*, pp. 219–20.

⁶¹ See for example Theiner, *VMH*, II, nos. 218, 226; G. Holmes, *The Good Parliament*, Oxford, 1975, pp. 7 ff.

⁶² Theiner, *VMH*, II, no. 222.

⁶³ Ibid., II, no. 224.

would himself come to Italy; in the spring of 1372 the pope wrote to Francis of Carrara, Louis's chief ally in northern Italy, that if the king seriously desired to lead an army in aid of the Church the Curia would pay 150,000 florins towards his expenses. Florence and the other Guelf powers would have to pay the rest of the money needed.⁶⁴

In September 1371 the Ottoman Turks inflicted a terrible defeat on the Serbian princes Uglješa and Vukasin at the battle of the river Maritza. As a result the Turkish advance again figured prominently in Louis's relations with the pope. In May 1372 Louis was sent an urgent plea to resist the Turks, who had invaded Greece, reached the borders of Hungary, Serbia, Albania and Slavonia, and clearly intended to break through to the Adriatic Sea. As there was at present no hope of a general passage, the task of defence lay in the hands of front-line Christian powers like Venice and Hungary.⁶⁵ But Gregory XI believed that the Visconti threat was at least as great as that posed by the Turks; just two months after urging Louis to defend the Balkans against the Turks he was again hoping to get Hungarian help in Italy, and for that reason worked towards peace between Louis and Charles IV.⁶⁶ Soon afterwards Louis himself made another offer of help, persuading the dukes of Bavaria too to volunteer as papal allies.⁶⁷ Gregory desperately needed Hungarian help: in January 1373 he was reduced to pleading that the troops sent by Louis to help Francis of Carrara against the Venetians be diverted against the Visconti instead.⁶⁸

Italy and the East had come into violent collision. Towards the end of 1372 Gregory XI hoped that Louis would help to organize a defensive league of Christian powers threatened by the Turks, sending envoys to a conference which was to assemble at Thebes.⁶⁹ For Louis the Turks had their uses, furnishing a convenient excuse for more complaints about the pope's taxation of the Church in his kingdoms. He sent a messenger to the Curia asking that Hungarian clerics be exempted from the one-year tenth which the pope had levied, on the grounds that they had to contribute towards the expenses of his forthcoming expedition against the Turks. Gregory suspected that clerical advice was behind this tactic and told the

⁶⁴ G. Mollat, ed., *Gregory XI: Lettres secrètes et curiales intéressant les pays autres que la France*, Paris, 1962–65 (hereafter Mollat), no. 617.

⁶⁵ Theiner, *VMH*, II, no. 230.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, II, nos. 235–36.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, II, no. 245.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, II, no. 268.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, II, no. 262. For the abortive Thebes conference, see Halecki, *Empereur de Byzance*, pp. 254 ff.

Hungarian prelates to pay up.⁷⁰ To Louis he sent what amounted to a clear statement of his crusading policy. The Visconti, he wrote, posed a serious threat to the pope and his allies in northern Italy; in one and a half months they had captured more than eighty fortified places. They were guilty of ill-treating the Church in their lands, and they were an obstacle to the organization of a general passage. There was no hope of a concerted effort in Greece, Bulgaria or the eastern Mediterranean until they were crushed, which in turn would be impossible if the papal *camera* was denied the Hungarian tenth. In addition, Louis could afford to fight the Turks without Church aid.⁷¹ This last point was valid, as Louis had succeeded to the Polish throne in 1372, but traditionally a king on crusade enjoyed the financial backing of his Church.

The dilemma which Gregory XI and his cardinals faced was by no means new,⁷² but this did not lessen its severity. It is clear from Gregory's correspondence that he urgently desired to crush once and for all the power and influence of the family which had for more than fifty years wrecked the political plans of the papacy;⁷³ if there was any hope of Louis helping in this then it was to be encouraged. But at this point Louis was showing more interest in the Turks, and in March 1373 Gregory issued a series of letters granting the king a full-scale crusade against them. Louis agreed to lead an army on campaign within a year of May 1373, and would aim to push the Turks out of the Balkans completely. The crusade would be preached in Hungary, Poland and Dalmatia with full indulgences for all who fought for six months, while crusade chests would be used to collect funds for the expedition. This was, however, less than Louis wanted. No lucrative taxes were levied on the Hungarian Church; the crusade was to be preached only in Louis's lands and only his subjects would be allowed to take the cross; the proceeds of the chests were to be spent only on the crusade, under pain of excommunication; and before starting to preach, the prelates of Hungary were to exact from their king an oath that he would personally lead the expedition and that he would abide by the pope's conditions.⁷⁴

Louis's crusading zeal was arousing the sort of suspicion at the Curia which had long been attached to the projects of French kings

⁷⁰ Theiner, *VMH*, II, no. 266.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, II, no. 267.

⁷² See Housley, *Italian Crusades*, pp. 71–75; *id.*, 'Pope Clement V and the Crusades of 1309–10' (*Journal of Medieval History*, VIII, Amsterdam, 1982, pp. 29–43).

⁷³ L. Mirot et al., eds, *Gregory XI: Lettres secrètes et curiales relatives à la France*, Paris, 1935–57, no. 2892.

⁷⁴ Theiner, *VMH*, II, nos. 270–73.

and princes.⁷⁵ This dubious distinction he had earned by twenty years of defaulting on promises. Of course he might now be in earnest; the Ottoman threat was serious and the Balkans had to be defended. In April 1373 Charles IV of Bohemia was asked to take part in the Hungarian crusade, or at least to help restore peace in central Europe, so that Louis's soldiers would have a greater chance of success against an enemy whose advance now threatened the empire as well as Hungary.⁷⁶ But it was equally possible that Louis was using the Turks as a pretext for renewed territorial expansion at the expense of the schismatic Christians of the Balkans, the Serbs, Wallachians and Bulgarians.⁷⁷ More importantly, Italy too needed defending from the Visconti, and Gregory XI was not prepared to give way on the collection of the tenth. In May 1373 he told the Hungarian prelates that they were to stop preaching the crusade if Louis obstructed the collection of the papal tenth.⁷⁸ And to Francis of Carrara, negotiating on Louis's behalf, Gregory wrote in September that he could not remit the tenth as it had been levied for the Church's 'urgent necessities'.⁷⁹

No action was being taken in the Balkans when, in September 1373, Gregory XI gave a nuncio a faculty to offer the king of Hungary 20,000 florins a month for a year if he came to Lombardy with an army of 12,000 men-at-arms to fight the Visconti.⁸⁰ Negotiations on this project were still in progress in January 1374.⁸¹ Meanwhile the Hungarian clergy exercised various stratagems to avoid paying the tenth.⁸² Gregory, who knew that the Hungarian Church was thriving by comparison with those of France and Italy, showed little sympathy:

We do not cease to wonder at the prelates and the other churchmen of the said kingdom, who seem to have no fear of ecclesiastical censures and are refusing to help us and the Roman Church in this crisis, despite the great Church revenues which they enjoy thanks to the good peace with which God's grace has blessed the realm; other prelates and churchmen in different parts [of the world] have generously come to our aid on seeing our needs, even when suffering from the effects of war.⁸³

⁷⁵ See my article, 'The Franco-Papal Crusade Negotiations of 1322–23' (*Papers of the British School at Rome*, XLVIII, London, 1980, pp. 166–85), where there are clear parallels to several of the issues discussed here.

⁷⁶ Mollat, no. 1651.

⁷⁷ This was Halecki's judgement on all Louis's anti-Turkish projects: see *Empereur de Byzance*, pp. 135, 268–69.

⁷⁸ Mollat, no. 1769, and see also no. 1744.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, no. 2208.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, no. 2163.

⁸¹ Theiner, *VMH*, II, no. 282.

⁸² *Ibid.*, II, no. 280.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, II, no. 292.

To make things worse, Louis was now linking his provision of aid in Lombardy with papal support for his aims in the *Regno*.⁸⁴

To Gregory XI the failure of Louis to take effective action against the Turks appeared as gross deception and negligence. Thus in September 1374 he exhorted the king to send galleys in collaboration with other threatened powers: 'reflect with care that if you for your part abandon the said league, then others who want to join and contribute to it will also quit'.⁸⁵ A few months later Louis was reminded that he had promised to send help to John Palaeologus if the emperor returned to the Catholic Church, but had since failed to send any. If the king kept his word and showed his fraternal feelings by giving aid to the people of Constantinople, it could make all the difference to Church union.⁸⁶ And in October 1375 Louis was asked to remember that it was he who had requested crusade preaching against the Turks, and had then done nothing. Now was his chance to make up for it. The Curia was organizing a sea-borne expedition to the East, the core of which would be made up by the Hospitallers. Louis should despatch an army, either that planned in 1373 or a smaller one, to co-operate with this force; as in 1366, the Curia had optimistic hopes of a Christian pincer-action against the Turks.⁸⁷ Louis's subsequent failure to act was partly responsible for the diversion of the Hospitaller expedition to a fruitless campaign in Greece.⁸⁸ No doubt recent experience had shown Louis that crusading unions or leagues of Latin powers tended to be ramshackle and short-lived. But they also represented the best way of co-ordinating the resources and harmonizing the interests of those powers. When Louis died in 1382 he had done little to counter the Ottoman menace to his lands, and it is hard to disagree with Oskar Halecki's verdict that Louis 'not only deceived the Roman Curia, but also did grave damage, in this matter, to the vital interests of Hungary'.⁸⁹

IV

For the crusading movement, Louis's reign was a sorry trail of disappointed hopes. No doubt the popes were partly to blame for

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, II, no. 299.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, II, no. 300. The same argument had been used by Pope John XXII in 1333. See *Annales ecclesiastici*, ad annum 1333, no. 15, vol. xxiv, p. 513.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, ad annum 1375, no. 6 (misprinted as 5), vol. xxvi, pp. 248–49.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, ad annum 1375, nos. 7–8, vol. xxvi, pp. 249–50.

⁸⁸ See A. Luttrell, 'The Hospitallers at Rhodes, 1306–1421', in K. M. Setton, gen. ed., *A History of the Crusades*, vol. III: *The Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries*, Madison (Wisconsin), 1975, pp. 301–03.

⁸⁹ *Empereur de Byzance*, p. 319.

this. They rarely gave their attention wholeheartedly to the defence of the Balkans or the problem of its schismatic Christians; they preferred Hungarian soldiers to fight for them against the Visconti rather than against Serbs, Bulgarians or Turks; they were in fierce competition with Louis for the tenths and subsidies of the Hungarian Church. But the papal Curia often failed to give a firm lead in crusading affairs, especially those of eastern Europe. Louis was a powerful and ambitious king and it was up to him to take the initiative and follow it through. This he did not do. He grasped the vital fact that his lands were ideally placed to benefit from the crusade but lacked the consistency to exploit this advantage to the full. He made some profits from crusading, especially in Bulgaria and Serbia, but not as much as he might have done, given the rich possibilities in Italy and the Balkans.⁹⁰ Of course he was not to foresee the appalling plight of Hungary in the fifteenth century: though it should be noted that papal letters from 1372 onwards reveal a heightened sense of danger. Louis handled the politics of Holy War with skill but also with exaggerated caution, playing his cards with none of the daring of his ancestor, Charles of Anjou. So he got less than he might have out of the crusades, and contributed less too.

⁹⁰ Hóman's claim that Louis 'liberò lo Stato della Chiesa dalle devastazioni dei suoi nemici' (op. cit., p. 433), was a wild exaggeration.